

Citizens Liaison Committee to Community Center
Minutes – November 21, 2006 – Hydrangea Room, TP Community Center, 7500 Maple Ave.

Meeting convened at 7:30 p.m.

Members in attendance:

Howard Kohn, Juanita Kus-Lorentz, Andy Keleman, Erik Lichtenberg, Dave Lorentz, Ray Scannell, Paul Chrostowski, Lorraine Pearsall, Wayne Sherwood and Cindy Dyballa
Staff: Barbara Matthews, Suzanne Ludlow, Debra Haiduven

The Committee received a lengthy presentation of the "Gym Feasibility Study" from a representative of ANCL Architects.

The Committee took no action at this meeting except to elicit information from ANCL and to discuss the overall situation.

BREAKDOWN OF OPTIONS

ANCL'S CHEAPEST OPTION – They costed out a gym comparable to Piney Branch at the Grant Ave. side of the community center – with underground parking – at \$5.5 million, not including architectural fees.

ANCL'S OTHER OPTIONS – Their estimates for a gym comparable to Blair High, located on the side or at the rear, were in the \$8 million range. Even by eliminating underground parking and the holding cells, the cost would still be higher than \$6 million, plus architectural fees.

A FOURTH OPTION – We asked for the approximate cost of a Piney Branch gym at the rear of the building, with no underground parking, no holding cells, and minimalist support space. This is probably the cheapest option. There should be savings on site work. Nonetheless the preliminary estimate for this option is about \$4 million, plus architectural fees.

HILLSIDE OPTIONS – The ANCL architects did a preliminary investigation of locating a detached gym either into the Takoma Park Elementary hillside behind the community center or into the Piney Branch Elementary hillside kitty-corner to the center. Although they did not cost out these options it's their opinion that few, if any savings, could be gained.

NEW LOCATION – Without specifying a location, we asked about the cost of building a gym in an empty lot with no underground problems and available parking. Even in such an "ideal" scenario the base cost would be about \$3 million, plus architectural fees and the cost of acquiring the empty lot – again bringing the total cost into the same general range.

KEY FACTORS

FUNDRAISING – Currently about \$1.5 million is "pledged" for the gym – half in a five-year donation from Washington Adventist Hospital, the other half in separate grants from the State. An additional \$360,000 grant from the County is pending. It is possible more funding could be raised from the State and County in the next cycle,

although any optimism has to be tempered by the budget shortfalls already predicted for both jurisdictions.

TIMETABLE – The ANCL study assumed it would take about 30 months to complete the gym. A faster pace would realize savings, perhaps as much as \$500,000, but since we need a full set of new design drawings that likely must go through a County review the 30-month timetable seems realistic.

PARKING – About 145 parking spaces exist at the community center. City staff will be counting the number of spaces occupied at different times of the day to give us data on current parking use. The County's suggested requirement for the center – without a gym – is 135 spaces. (The original requirement was 211, but it was lowered due to the proximity of the Metro.) For the purposes of their study ANCL assumed we would need 175 spaces if a gym is built.

OPERATING COSTS -- It would be more costly to operate a detached gym because of a separate heating-and-cooling system and extra staff.

QUESTIONS & DECISIONS

GYM – Should the City take out a 20-year or 30-year bond and build a gym? Should the City undertake an aggressive lobbying campaign to try to win very large grants from the State and County in the next cycle? Or should the City adopt a wait-and-see plan, waiting until Piney Branch Elementary is renovated or replaced, for instance?

THE “PICASSO” LOOK – At one point someone aptly compared the Grant Ave. side of the community center to a Picasso drawing. If no gym is built in this location, how should we finish off the façade, the plaza and the former police parking lot, and at what cost? Should the open space be configured for outdoor performances or outdoor sports? Or as a grassy courtyard with trees? Or as a new parking lot? And should the façade and plaza be completed?

AUDITORIUM & KITCHEN – These are the two major unfinished indoor spaces in the community center. If the gym is delayed into the long-term future, should money be spent instead on a significant upgrade of the auditorium and a new kitchen?

LANDSCAPING – There is some urgency to this question since County Parks is on the verge of finalizing a design for the Grant Ave. entrance to the park behind Piney Branch Elementary, which will alter the location of the cul-de-sac and put in an ADA ramp. If no gym is to be built at the community center, should the City move ahead with a landscaped berm near the cul-de-sac as originally promised?

LIBRARY – Early on, the library and the library façade were to be included with the construction of the community center, but this idea was abandoned. Should the City embark on a study to see if any changes for the library are warranted?

CEMENT DECK – Covering the below-grade parking lot at the front of the community center was another part of the original plan. Where does cement decking now fit into the scheme of things?